

Country Notes for April 2025

April, being the first full month of spring, is a month of real change. Plants are growing and flowering again, lawns require cutting, migrant birds start appearing in numbers and the wildlife of our villages seems to leap into overdrive. Birds in particular, if they have not done so already, will be busy building nests for their eggs and offspring. Many birds have their nests hidden deep inside our village hedges – and we should certainly be very mindful of this if contemplating any hedge trimming.

Other birds however are much more obvious and rooks certainly fall into this category. With their nests high in the trees and their constant chattering they are hard to miss in the comparative safety that their height above ground provides.

Our villages in mid Kent play host to a variety of members of the crow family. In addition to rooks there are carrion crows, jackdaws. Jays, magpies and, recently, the regular appearance of ravens, until only a few years ago a rare sight in Kent.

Rooks are the most sociable of the crow tribe with their rookeries consisting of many families all living in close proximity. Apart from the social aspect of their nesting, rooks may be identified from carrion crows by the whitish patch at the base of their beaks. Only young rooks fail to show this patch which, until they mature, can make them difficult to distinguish from the less sociable carrion crows. Wherever there is a rookery it is also worth looking out for jackdaws. These members of the crow family are smaller than rooks and carrion crows, and display silvery grey markings on their mainly black plumage. They frequently nest below a rookery, presumably finding safety in numbers.

Compared with some places we have surprisingly few rookeries in our villages but there are some and the residents are always a pleasure to watch as they pursue their busy lives high in the trees.

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